

TodayOnline Special Food Feature : A Different Christmas 2010

19 November 2010

Week 2 - The Spirit of Giving

Eat, Help, Love

Feed your body, mind and soul. Nida Seah introduces four restaurants that serve up food for a good cause.



Putting a new spin to 'soul food', these four restaurants serve a lot more than good food. As you order a dish, you are encouraged to think about not just what you are eating, but others who are not able to enjoy the simple luxuries of life or even the basic essentials.

At **Food For Thought**, you don't have to look too closely to find out what makes it unique – because it is staring right in your face once you sit down. Messages on placemats shout out five mission statements in big bold fonts. They include lines like "Inspire kind acts 'cause apathy is so last millennium" and "Feed good food 'cause no child should starve in a world of happy meals".

The stylish eatery, which is often filled with students and arty types from the Bugis area, is clear about who and what they support. Kuik Shiao-yin, one of the three directors, explained: "We take part of the profits and put it into development projects that we believe in." These include Living Water International, UN Food Programme, World Vision International and the education of East Timorese youth.

What began as an alternative General Paper tuition programme eventually expanded to four social enterprises – a publishing arm, an educational tour company, a 'School of Thought' tuition centre and two eateries.

On why they set up a restaurant, Kuik said: "If we are really keen about public education, then there has to be some sort of outreach beyond students and teachers. So the most readily accessible thing for the public is a restaurant."



At this latest branch at Queen Street, you can help impoverished Asian communities just by ordering a roasted pumpkin risotto or red velvet cake from its mainly Western menu. For some ethical shopping, browse through its merchandise section. "In this outlet, we specially designed a showcase for certain products that we source from around the world, associated with social causes. Part of the profits will go into developmental work," said Kuik. "In buying direct from these guys, we also support NGOs as well."

"Ultimately, what we're about is understanding not just Singapore but Singapore's responsibility to the rest of the world."

At **Professor Brawn Café**, a colourful superhero character welcomes you with a smile as you enter. This is Professor Brawn, the inspiring catalyst for a social enterprise "based on the values of quality, dignity and inclusiveness".



Like Food For Thought, you cannot escape Professor Brawn's social message. Its mission statement is written clearly on the café's walls. As you enjoy its popular Fish & Chips and Gourmet German Sausages with Rosti, you are 'taught' that this is casual dining with a serious endeavour.

Owner and CEO Tay Kiong Hong explained the reason for the concept: "It goes back to my son who has autism. He's 15 years old and attends Pathlight School. I've also been exposed to many families with special needs. With that in mind, and our interaction with the special school, my wife and I found out that there are a lot of kids who, once they get out of school, probably would not be able to work."

"You can call it a calling. I left the corporate world after 30 years to start this venture where I can provide employment opportunities and support to people with special needs so that they can integrate into society as normally as possible and to also give them a dignified future."

In fact, Professor Brawn – the character – is the creation of Mr Tay's son. The one-year-old café works with Pathlight School, a government-aided special school and Singapore's first autism-focussed school that offers the mainstream academic curriculum. Mr Tay employs autistic youths and teaches them important work and life skills. The youths go through a three-month induction programme before being hired with a proper employment contract.

There is also a small merchandise corner selling items designed by the youths from the school. Mr Tay currently has eight autistic youths working part-time at the café, and is considering opening a second branch.

Over at Little India is Food#03 – BenBino's, a deli-bar/social enterprise run by artist and social entrepreneur Woon Tien Wei and chef Ben Kway. Here, you can enjoy a Western menu, along with Fairtrade drinks and organic beers and wines, without feeling guilty.

According to Woon, the deli-bar is all about going back to basics. He said: "Start with small acts, they can make a difference."

"As an enterprise, we believe we should always improve the way we do things. We recycle and re-use our waste; for example, coffee grounds are used as fertilisers, organic waste is made into garbage enzyme, used cooking oil is recycled into bio-diesel." A third of its profit from bar sales goes to Post-Museum's (an independent cultural space) operations and programmes.

Food#03 – BenBino’s also contributes to The Soup Kitchen programme initiated by volunteers, Food#03 and Post-Museum. It is closed on Mondays because its kitchen then is open to volunteers who prepare food for 75 to 90 needy people around the neighbourhood.



This Christmas, Food#03 – BenBino’s will have a special menu for groups and small businesses. Diners can feast for a good cause because the deli-bar will donate 10% of the proceeds to a cause that the group identifies with. A Christmas Fairtrade gift pack comprising coffee and coffee plunger is also available for purchase.

WHERE TO GO:	
Food For Thought	8 Queen Street 9am to 10pm (Mon to Sat); 9am to 9pm (Sun) T: 6338 9887 E: omnomnom@foodforthought.com.sg
Professor Brawn	#02-78/79 Novena Square 238 Thomson Road Open daily 11.30am to 10pm (last order 9pm) T: 6253 4650 E: enquiry@professorbrawn.com
Food#03 – BenBino’s	109 Rowell Road 5pm to 10pm (Tue to Thur); 5pm to midnight (Fri); 2pm to midnight (Sat); 2pm to 10pm (Sun) T: 6396 7980 E: admin@food03.sg

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